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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Thirty-first session

Summary record of the 661st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 16 July 2004, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Ferrer Gómez (Vice-Chairperson)

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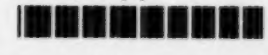

In the absence of the Chairperson, Ms. Ferrer Gómez, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined initial, second and third periodic reports and combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Angola (*continued*) (CEDAW/C/AGO/1-3 and CEDAW/C/AGO/4-5)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Angola took places at the Committee table.*

2. **The Chairperson** invited the delegation to respond to questions raised at an earlier meeting.

3. **Ms. Delgado** (Angola) said that, with regard to Government efforts towards reconciliation, she could mention the establishment of the Inter-Sectoral Commission for the Peace Process and National Reconciliation and subsequently the National Commission for the Social and Productive Reintegration of the Demobilized and the Displaced. The Government of Unity and National Reconciliation had declared a general amnesty in 2002 after the signing of the Luena Memorandum of Understanding. In addition, some political and civil society organizations conducted peace and solidarity campaigns.

4. No specific figures were available concerning violence against women and children during the conflict. Neither the Government nor the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) had provided concrete information on child soldiers. However, it was estimated that more than 1.5 million children had been directly affected by the conflict. In the quartering areas, some 264,000 children had been registered so that they could be provided with identity papers. Most children were afraid to identify the perpetrators of violence. Programmes had been instituted to deal with war trauma in both adults and children. By the time the Luena Memorandum of Understanding had been signed in 2002, it was estimated that over four million people had been internally displaced. By December 2003, over three million had returned to their communities, although nearly a million had remained in camps. By April 2004 that number had been halved.

5. The Angolan Government had programmes and projects of assistance and social reintegration to help internally displaced persons and Angolan refugees in other countries. With regard to children at risk, there were projects to provide milk and food, substitute mothers, family tracing and reunification and community education. Projects to benefit handicapped persons involved community-based rehabilitation, small-scale fishing enterprises and occupational training. In order to provide social assistance to families in extreme poverty, social centres had been established, occupational training was provided and tools and seeds, resettlement kits and occupational kits were distributed.

6. With regard to the repatriation of Angolan refugees, agreements had been signed between the Government of Angola and the asylum countries: with the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia and Zambia in 2002 and with Botswana and South Africa in 2003. There had been a total of over 450,000 Angolan refugees in asylum countries, the largest numbers being in Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. While many thousands of refugees had returned under an organized repatriation programme, even more (over 190,000) had returned spontaneously. Spontaneous returnees were entitled to the same rights and assistance as organized returnees. Women made up 53 per cent of repatriated returnees.

7. All returnees were covered by the same reintegration programme applicable to all categories of persons affected by the armed conflict. They had access to land according to the norms and procedures for resettlement of the displaced population, land distribution being the responsibility of provincial authorities. They received assistance according to the vulnerability assessment done by joint teams put together by the Government with the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Reception centres had been set up and equipped with shelters, water points, communal kitchens, warehouses, health centres and camp administration areas, so that they could provide shelter, food and medical care, distribute reintegration kits, register returnees and transport them to their final destinations. A gender perspective was applied with regard to women heads of households and in the

provision of assistance to the handicapped and older persons.

8. Angola had a Technical Unit for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UTCAH), a counterpart to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), to manage funds from donor countries. However, many non-governmental organizations received funds directly and the budgets of projects funded by United Nations agencies were under the responsibility of those agencies. A question had been asked about genital mutilation. It was not part of the traditional Angolan culture, although there were a few reported cases among women from other cultures or married to men from other cultures.

9. The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women by the year 2000 had been elaborated in 1995 in follow-up to Angola's participation in the Fourth World Conference on Women and had identified as priority areas health, women's political participation, environment, the young girl, poverty, violence, social communication and arts, education and rights of citizenship. In 2000 an evaluation had been done and submitted to the Economic Commission for Africa and had later been discussed at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. On the basis of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Ministry of Family and Promotion of Women had elaborated the National Strategy and Strategic Framework for the Promotion of Gender Equality by the year 2005 with the participation of women members of Parliament, women's organizations in the various political parties, experts, non-governmental organizations, focal points and churches. Because of the difficult situation in the country in recent years and financial constraints, the strategy was being implemented only in part.

10. Angola had begun to experiment with microcredit programmes. In 1999, it had instituted a pilot programme aimed at influencing the adoption of a favourable framework for microcredit programmes initiated by non-governmental organizations. Banco Sol had introduced a new microcredit package available to women's solidarity groups operating in the informal sector, and a new bank entirely devoted to microfinance was soon to begin operating. The United Nations Development Programme was also initiating a project, with funding by Chevron-Texaco, to develop an institutional environment favourable to the development of microfinance.

11. Some questions had been raised about the resources and methods of the Ministry of Family and Promotion of Women. The Ministry had a budget of $1,206,850, representing 0.02 per cent of the general government budget for the year 2004. In addition, international donors had provided $576,000 for a project on peace-building that the Ministry was carrying out with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and $92,351 for a project supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to build the institutional capacity of the Ministry and national women's non-governmental organizations to introduce gender issues into government strategies and programmes.

12. The Ministry had links with focal points, not only in other ministries but also in institutions at the local level and public enterprises, to ensure that gender issues were taken into account in all sectoral initiatives. It carried out sensitization and gender-advocacy activities with political and parliamentary leaders and other influential groups of women and had established a network of gender trainers. Its strategy for countering stereotypes was sensitization through the mass media, workshops, meetings, presentations in schools, workplaces, markets, police stations, the army and the community in general. In rural communities dissemination of the information was done in local languages. The Ministry's Family Counselling Centre was set up to provide psychosocial and legal assistance and information about social, civil, political, economic and cultural rights. Every year the centre organized a 16-day campaign against gender-based violence.

13. The Group of Women MPs in Angola's parliament was a multiparty group, comprising all of the legislature's 16 per cent of women members, and pledged to defend gender equality. The next Electoral Law should ensure a higher proportion of women in the parliament. As for women's participation in cultural life, the only restraints were financial, though with the advent of peace there were more facilities for culture than before. Polygamy may have been a part of Angola's rural tradition, but in urban areas it manifested itself as promiscuity with none of the traditional safeguards, thereby spreading HIV and AIDS. Access to land was the same for either sex, with the Land Law ensuring no discrimination. Access to education and ongoing training were a fundamental right, and there already had been a Labour Law

regulating enterprises in the private sector and the administration in the public sector.

14. The 1981 Law, revised in 2000, covered such aspects of women labour as maternity leave (including additional leave), part-time work, duration and organization of shifts for women, and work which women were not allowed to do or which was allowed only under certain conditions. Under this law, penalties were stipulated for infringements. There was also a conciliation service within the Labour Courts, chaired by a representative of the Ministry, to attempt to achieve an agreement binding upon the parties, without their having to go to law. Cases in which an agreement was not reached were heard in the Labour Courts. There was likewise a national Inspectorate, to ensure compliance with the law, which was based upon the provisions of the 33 international conventions ratified by Angola, for instance ILO Convention No. 100 concerning Equal Remuneration and Convention No. 111 concerning Discrimination (employment and occupation).

15. Children were a large proportion of the labour force, unprotected because of their ignorance of the law, and were victims of the economic situation in the country. Angola had, however, ratified the two main conventions on child labour, and, under the Constitution, children were supposed to enjoy the protection of the family, the State and society. The Government of Angola was aware of the need to free children from the need to work, provide them with education and reintegrate them into society without leaving their families destitute, which could be achieved only through economic growth.

16. Seminars and workshops were being organized in cooperation with the National Committee of Trade Union Women to make people aware of the law, the kind of problems that women faced in the workplace, and the mechanisms available to address them. Suitable first jobs for the young, especially young girls, were also a priority in a country with such a youthful population. Women workers who were wives and mothers were also ensured all benefits under the Labour Law. A programme funded by the Chinese Government, the World Bank and the African Bank for Development aimed to ensure that by 2015 all children, with priority given to girls and the most vulnerable, should have access to good primary education, which at the moment was available for four years and partly extended to six years under the current educational reforms.

17. Literacy classes and training for a livelihood should be available to all adults, especially women, by 2015, thus ensuring equal access to education for all. At the moment 70 per cent of women and 60 per cent of men were illiterate. No study had yet been carried out to determine why there were disparities in the level of education between men and women, but a gender programme was being implemented between 2000 and 2005, with support from a donor country and UNICEF, which included establishing the National Commission on Gender, training of teachers, drawing up a teacher-training manual, monitoring the number of boys and girls who finished the school year successfully, or failed to do so, and a revision of the curriculum to include gender issues, HIV/AIDS, human rights, and reproductive health.

18. Angola had a National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS for 2003 to 2008, funded by the World Bank and supported by UNAIDS. Under Angola's commitments enshrined in the Millennium Declaration Goals, it had approved a Programme for the Prevention of Vertical Transmission, which was being gradually expanded, and had created the National Commission to Combat AIDS. The infection rate had risen from 3.4 per cent in 1999 to 8.6 per cent in 2002 among the overall population, and from 20 per cent to 33 per cent among prostitutes in Luanda. Sixty per cent of cases were among people between the ages of 20 and 39, and the prevalence was growing fast among young women, presumably because increased poverty led to an increase in prostitution. A project funded by UNDP was being implemented through the education system to reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS.

19. The National Strategic Plan was also intended to tackle the problem of maternal morbidity and mortality, with norms and policies for sexual and reproductive health based on the Cairo Declaration, through improved public health and a drive to promote women's capacity to decide on their own reproductive needs. The Ministry would monitor the number of maternal deaths in maternity wards throughout the country, through Audit Committees that had been active in Luanda since 1992. Since the 1992 peace agreement was signed, education and health had been the Government's national priorities. Most of the existing infrastructure for maternal and infant health had been destroyed in the war, but some initiatives

were being implemented, and spending on health had risen, especially on women's health and reproductive health. Traditional midwives were being trained and integrated into the national health service network, especially in rural areas.

20. The Ministry of Health was promoting family planning so as to increase the average gap between children to at least two years. It aimed to support community programmes distributing contraceptives and promoting changes in behaviour, and Angola attached no conditions to access to contraceptives. It was important that the young people involved should themselves take a responsible and active part in those campaigns. Activists were trained to work in the community. Although health care was free in principle in Angola (with the possibility of some being required at some time in the future), there was a lack of infrastructure and qualified medical personnel, especially in the rural areas. Traditional midwives, therefore, had to be trained to identify risks in pregnancy. The vast majority of women still gave birth at home with no care from the health service, and the percentage of women or couples using contraception was also low, in spite of the fact that Angola had had reproductive health programmes since 1985.

21. **Ms. Gnacadja** had found the delegation's answers concerning culture very brief and diffident, and wondered whether there was a need to remember that culture and tradition were not something static, handed down from on high. They were a nexus of behaviours created by men, born of the environment, religion, politics, history and economics of a particular time and place. When any of those elements changed, it was time for a change in behaviour, and that was why States which ratified the Convention committed themselves to eliminate, however slowly, traditions and practices that were discriminatory. The Convention was unambiguous: if it came into conflict with discriminatory practices, the Convention had to prevail, however difficult that might seem to achieve. She therefore urged the Angolan Government to move forward in the awareness that discriminatory traditions were often deeply rooted. Men and women needed to effect change, and she had every confidence in Angola's ability to achieve such change.

22. **Ms. Šimonović** wished to know whether the new Constitution contained provisions on gender equality and on the direct application of treaties to which Angola was a State party. She also wondered whether it contained a definition of discrimination, in line with the Convention.

23. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** commented that the writing of the Constitution provided an opportunity for women to articulate their needs. She inquired whether a legal basis for temporary special measures had been introduced into the new Constitution and pointed out that, according to the Convention, they were the most appropriate means of accelerating the achievement of de facto equality. In that regard, she urged the Government to pay particular attention to general recommendation No. 25. Angola was encouraged to have the most important recommendations translated into the national language so that administrators in the different ministries would understand the meaning of the Convention articles correctly.

24. **Ms. Achmad** said that information on private schools should be included in the following report and wondered whether the Government was monitoring the private schools' compliance with the national Constitution and as well as their implementation of the Convention, particularly article 10.

25. **Ms. Saiga** asked whether legal advice centres still existed and whether they were separate from family counselling centres. Their role needed to be further clarified.

26. **Ms. Delgado** (Angola) said that there was a conflict between modern culture and tradition. Although positive law prevailed in general, customary law was still used to resolve conflicts in the rural areas. The Government had indeed implemented temporary special measures. One example was the Ministry of Family and Promotion of Women, which had been created to advance women's rights. The Ministry collaborated with other Government institutions and private and public companies to ensure gender mainstreaming and had elaborated a National Strategy and Strategic Framework for the Promotion of Gender Equality.

27. The second temporary special measure was the creation of family counselling centres where traditional authorities, the mass media, churches, non-governmental organizations, social workers and women's organizations worked together to monitor and evaluate women's programmes. Another positive step was that, according to the provisions of the new Constitution, at least 30 per cent of the judiciary, the executive and parliament must be female. The aim was

to ensure that women participated in all levels of decision-making. Girls' private schools were expected to comply with the gender mainstreaming policies and programmes of the Ministry of Education. Family counselling centres provided both legal aid and advice on family conflicts and domestic violence. Their main objectives were to make the population aware of its rights and to offer legal aid to both men and women.

28. **The Chairperson** said that Angola had demonstrated its political will by sending such a large delegation and hoped that, the war having ended, the Government could now submit its reports more regularly. Angola should take advantage of the current spirit of peace and reconciliation to develop solid strategies on gender equality. The Committee was aware that Angola had undergone a difficult, protracted war, which had produced hundreds of thousands of displaced persons and refugees. It was interesting to learn how the programmes for the reintegration of the affected population and the voluntary repatriation of refugees guaranteed access to fundamental human rights to employment, health and education. The Committee was pleased that the programmes were being developed with gender equality in mind.

29. Angola was to be congratulated on having ratified the Optional Protocol and was urged to familiarize the population with it. The Committee was gratified that the Family Code had been adopted, but felt that many other laws needed to be amended. Furthermore, there was a clear gap between the provisions of the laws and their actual implementation. Permanent programmes were required to change cultural patterns so that deep-rooted prejudice and discriminatory practices could be eliminated. Teachers, lawyers, doctors and journalists played a fundamental role in teaching women their rights and in changing society's stereotypical image of women. The Government was requested to carefully analyse both article 4.1 of the Convention, concerning the adoption of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality, and general recommendation No. 25.

30. With respect to education, the Committee had noted that there was a high level of illiteracy among women. However, the Government was striving to improve child education, decrease the dropout rate and create the necessary infrastructure. The Committee was interested to learn how Angola was attempting to implement article 11 of the Convention. A number of International Labour Organization agreements had been ratified but again, the Government was responsible for ensuring that they were actually being implemented. Finally, the Government was confronted with a large number of health issues, including the AIDS epidemic, high child and maternal mortality, the need for sex education and information on contraception, the need to improve reproductive health, and the rebuilding of the infrastructures destroyed during the war. Clearly, the Ministry of Family and Promotion of Women and the national mechanisms played a fundamental role in promoting health policies and programmes within the Government. It was hoped that Angola would find the necessary funding and resources to deal with the difficult situation that it was facing.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.